

Defects in the Postal System. (Continued from page 5)

anxiously before consenting to a proposition which thus subverts all our ideas of popular government.

There is enough of complication and menace in present postal conditions, defects hidden to the public but fully revealed to experts, to suggest extreme caution as to venturing on additional and still more dangerous features. The postoffice business, even on a legitimate basis, has grown so vast that the personal oversight of the head of the department is impossible. That chief executive and all his principal assistants, being political appointees, are removed at brief intervals, and have little opportunity to become familiar with their duties. The laws under which the mail service operates are a mass of inconsistencies—never systematically codified, but growing up year after year by hasty "provisos" attached to the annual appropriation bills, adding new features, modifying existing statutes, repealing and re-enacting, with no intelligent attention to coherence or effective operation.

Above all, the accounting system, upon which so much depends, is fatally defective. Of financial transactions aggregating a billion and a quarter dollars annually in accounts settled, less than ten per cent have the administrative audit or the review required by law, owing to inadequate clerical force in the auditor's office. There is not the independence of scrutiny and report that correct accounting principles require. There is no intelligible system, such as prevails in banking and railroad offices where the complications and responsibilities are not a hundredth part as great. Taking the service as it now is, without any additional branches, its business and labor are growing so much more rapidly than any other element of our social economy that we may well pause to inquire, whither does all this lead—where will it end? There is somewhere a limit to safety in the process of expansion, even on its present basis. It must be manifest to any careful thinker that this danger line will be reached soon enough without undue stimulus.

Champions of the doctrine of government management of all so-called "public utilities," argue illogically from a basis of supposed success in transporting the mails with speed and accuracy. The argument is illogical, because it fails to consider the fact that the government avails itself of innumerable private enterprises in accomplishing these results. The postoffice department owns practically nothing used in transporting the mails except the bags and the locks. The railroads, steamships, steamboats, stagecoaches, street cars, wagons, and carts are the private property of individuals or corporations hired for the public use. If the department owned all these instrumentalities, and were obliged to keep them in repair, to increase equipment and extend lines in response to public demand, the magnitude of the enterprise would be more clearly seen. Unquestionably a large share of the efficiency of our present service is due to the vigor and alertness of the corporate and individual energies employed therein.

An influential clientele now clamor for the parcels-post. These desire to have the limit of weight on packages of merchandise transmissible through the mails extended from four pounds, as at present, to eleven pounds or more. It is further proposed to establish a rate on such packages of six cents for the first pound and two cents for each additional pound up to eleven; thus eleven pounds would cost twenty-six cents from New York to Seattle, Honolulu, or Manila, or just sixty-two cents less than experience shows is the actual cost of service for average distances. Emphasis is placed upon the advantage to be derived by

consumers, who are urged to cooperate in seeking by this indirect means to reduce the high charges of railroads and express companies, which they allege now prevail.

It is argued that this concession would greatly increase business and accommodate the people. No account is taken of the loss that would necessarily result to the postal revenues, which it has been demonstrated would be over \$100,000,000 a year. That is a consideration of little weight with the manufacturers of small articles of merchandise, the department stores, etc., who would greatly profit by this new departure.

On the other hand retail merchants' associations in different sections energetically protest against the scheme. They warn retailers that their business may receive a most

who originate and promote it. It is difficult to see what argument can be adduced in favor of carrying parcels of merchandise at rates far below the cost of such carriage that will not equally apply to conducting our entire transportation or manufacturing business by the general government for the benefit of favored classes of its citizens. It is the belief of thinking persons that the use of the mails for transporting merchandise goes far enough under existing laws.

Some of the postal schemes proposed are bewildering in their details. One promoter insists on the early assumption by the federal government of the entire baggage, express, and postal car equipment of the country with the addition of about 1,000 fast freight cars—about 10,000 cars in all. With these different services—the

the means by which he is able so unjustly to live in idleness, will disappear, and he must work, as all men must work, or starve."

Upon the whole, then, and in conclusion: we have assimilated into our governmental structure an institution wearing all the aspects, containing all the defects, subject to all the abuse of a private or corporate enterprise, and we are, as a body politic, more poorly equipped for dealing with those evils than would be a corporation animated solely by business instincts and capable of acting strictly on business principles. The apparent success of this venture inspires incoherent demands for unlimited illegitimate additions to its already overburdened and dangerous functions.

There is enough in present conditions and current tendencies to give a loud warning against unwarranted expansion.—Harper's.

PARRY ON RATE-MAKING AND DISASTERS.

D. M. Parry, president of the National Manufacturers' association, writes to "American Industries" the following:

"I believe that government rate-making means the destroying of competition, and not monopoly; that it must be supplemented by legal pooling; that the results would tend to inflexibility in rates; the stopping of the wheels of progress; the magnifying of the power of the government to a dangerous degree and the introduction in our political life of a never-ending source of strife between the various parts of the nation. In fact, I believe it would be a national crime against the fundamental principles of a free country and a blow in the face of our great prosperity.

"Let those who favor government rate-making answer the arguments made against it. Incidentally it is no argument to charge those who oppose the proposition with being influenced by the railroads; nor is it a valid argument to saw the air with passionate tirades against the granting of rebates and other practices that are condemned by all.

"The question is one of the greatest moment, because it involves a departure in government policy that may have far-reaching consequences leading in the direction of Socialism. We have got along for fifty years without government fixing of railroad rates, and surely there are no good reasons for haste in considering the advisability of entering on such a course at the present time. At least it seems to me that the question is one that should be most carefully considered and that ample opportunity should be given for the fullest discussion upon it.

"In conclusion, I sincerely hope the majority of the members of this association will support the majority sentiment of its board of directors in the conclusion that there should be no immediate closure of the debate on government rate-making in this association."



EDWARDS DAVIS
In "The Unmasking" at the Orpheum Next Week

serious blow unless they bring to bear on national lawmakers the pressure necessary to defeat such legislation. They demonstrate that this system would permit mail order houses in the larger cities to ultimately control the retail business of the entire country, the expense of carrying merchandise for these establishments at a cost much in excess of the amount of postage received being paid for by public taxation.

The controversy thus going on between conflicting interests, one seeking advantage and the other fearing injury from an innovation in postal methods, shows how distinctively it is a part of the business machinery of the country, and how susceptible it is of abuse from unconsidered legislation for the especial behalf

handling of ordinary mail, express matter, and baggage—"combined under the postoffices, places of transfer to and from the railroads, the postal trolley car, and the automobile post office," he expects to revolutionize present conditions—as unquestionably he would.

An advanced Socialist thus portrays the good times that will ensue when there is "collective ownership of all means of production and distribution," and the postoffice department runs everything: "There will be no money in the present understanding of that term. The capitalist's gold and bond will have no more purchasing value than brown paper and iron. He must produce certificates of labor done in order to buy the simplest things which he needs. Profit, interest, and rent,

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Explanation by the Court.

In an appeal from a justice's court the justice accompanied the transcript with the following explanation: "This affidavit is overruled by the court on the ground of ignoring the court when requested to wait and hear the opinion of the court in regard to a continuance. And with his hat on his head, a cigar in his mouth, the said James Harvey went out, saying he did not care what I done with the case.—S. H. Mitchell, Justice of the Peace."